



Seattle Downtown Parks & Public Spaces Task Force Report

RENAISSANCE

A strategy to revitalize Seattle's public spaces



Draft Report
January 4, 2006

Seattle Downtown Parks & Public Spaces Task Force

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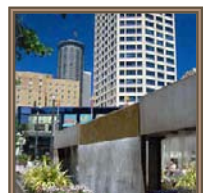


"Seattle Parks and Recreation will work with all citizens to be good stewards of our environment, and to provide safe and welcoming opportunities to play, learn, contemplate and build community."

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This report is the product of a truly collaborative effort by Task Force members, and staff from the Seattle Parks and Recreation Department and the Downtown Seattle Association. The group worked together for nearly a year, sharing perspectives, concerns, ideas and passions. While we watched the seasons change through the windows of our City Hall conference room, the group came to really understand the downtown parks and public spaces situation, and to craft an inspiring vision to realize the tremendous opportunity before us.

The project management team appreciates the hard work of the Task Force and its three co-chairs, and applauds their ability to reach consensus on a set of complex and challenging issues.





Vision for Downtown Parks and Public Spaces:
An Interconnected System of Unique Parks and Public Spaces

Seattle's downtown parks and public spaces are a system of vibrant, convivial, people-filled gathering spaces reflecting the city's diversity, history, urban character, and cultural and environmental values. The parks should have individual personalities, yet be connected together into an integrated network of open spaces and recreational places that are well-cared for and well-loved. They should be fun, beautiful, restorative and memorable places to spend time, through all four seasons, day and night.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

TASK FORCE CHARGE AND VISION FOR DOWNTOWN PARKS

This report presents the findings and recommendations of Mayor Greg Nickels' Downtown Parks and Public Spaces Task Force, charged with making recommendations to the Mayor on strategies to revitalize and activate the city's downtown parks and public open spaces. The Task Force's charge encompassed recommendations in five key areas: parks maintenance; safety and security; programming, events and commercial activities; management; and funding for capital and operating improvements. The nine-member Task Force met 15 times over 10 months, and brought a rich mix of perspectives and experience to the project, including local and national retail and public spaces expertise; on-the-ground familiarity with key parks and their use patterns; City policies and practices; and experience creating successful urban public places. The group toured the parks, and engaged in many hours of thoughtful – and at times spirited – discussions.

Situation Assessment and a Call to Action

Seattle's Downtown Parks Are Great, Underused Assets

Seattle's downtown parks and public spaces are potentially great assets for the whole city, and will play an especially important role in the City's efforts to enhance downtown's livability and distinctive urban quality of life. Today, however, most parks sit relatively unused. Many people in the city don't know that they exist, much less spend time in them, and there are virtually no organized programs to attract people to them. In the daytime, the downtown community largely passes them by, and in the evenings they more or less become ghost-towns. While some parks are gathering places for transients, predominantly men, others sit vacant on both weekdays and weekends. Some of the furnishings and amenities are old and worn. There is little public art and engaging amenities—such as playgrounds, dog runs and chess tables—are uncommon. Many of the fountains are in disrepair, the landscape could be improved in some parks, and there are limited seasonal plantings. The parks don't feel safe or welcoming and there are few reasons for people to visit them, especially in fall and winter months.

It's Time for a Renaissance in Seattle's Downtown Parks

The downtown area offers a potentially remarkable collection of parks—quiet gardens, social commons, waterfront viewpoints and refreshing green spots—that promise to enrich the lives of the downtown community and visitors to the city. But today this promise is not being fully realized. Too many parks are underused and under-valued – not safe, clean or inviting enough, despite the efforts of dedicated City staff who work in the parks. As rising numbers of individuals and families look to downtown as a livable and active residential area, it's time for Seattle to make its downtown parks the beautiful, vibrant and welcoming public spaces they were meant to be. As downtown booms, the parks should bloom.

TASK FORCE RECOMMENDATIONS

1 Foster a Downtown Parks Renaissance Through a New Partnership Between the City and the Downtown Community

Seattle's downtown parks are underused assets that can help transform the city center into a vibrant urban place of day and night live-work-play activity. Cities across the country with successful downtown park systems have recognized the catalytic role of parks in creating people-friendly, livable downtowns, and are investing significant maintenance, capital, security and programming resources in those spaces. Recognizing the complexity, special operating needs and funding requirements for a vital, active downtown park system, many cities have designed new management systems and structures to effectively meet those needs. In particular, activating the parks through lively events and programs, and creating an energetic parks advocacy and support network within the downtown community are two needs that are best met through a new management approach. Specific activities included in this approach would be:

Programming and Events

- Creating exciting activities in the parks, and publicizing and marketing them
- Managing special events, including the design and management of new events
- Promoting small-scale activity, such as entertainers and craft carts that rove from park to park
- Providing help to organizations and individuals with the events permitting process, including coordination with the permitting agencies
- Working with City staff to reinvent the existing Special Events Handbook as an attractive, user-friendly resource

Community Organizing and Capacity-building

- Enhancing relationships with existing park-specific advocacy groups and building relationships with new ones
- Organizing and building community support for neighborhood-focused parks

- Engaging with the surrounding downtown community, including organizing volunteers
- Developing new partnerships, relationships, and sponsorships

Fundraising and Advocacy

- Fundraising to support capital improvements and identified maintenance needs
- Advocating for downtown parks, including potential new parks

Liaison with Businesses

- Rejuvenating the adopt-a-park program and coordinating with adjacent businesses
- Working with building owners and managers to improve and publicize the city's privately owned but open-to-the-public spaces
- Participating in the development of park concession concepts and the selection of retail sellers, in coordination with neighborhood groups

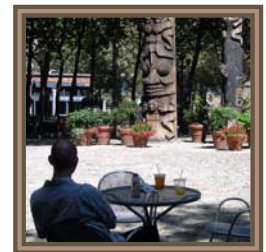
Implementing a new management approach could be accomplished by starting a new organization, partnering with an existing organization(s), or a combination of the two approaches. The Downtown Seattle Association (DSA) has been active on the Task Force, and sees downtown parks as an important element of a livable downtown. The DSA is interested in discussing this opportunity further and in potentially taking on a role in the implementation of these recommendations.

2 Implement a Coordinated, Citywide Action Plan to Improve Downtown Parks

The City should realign and focus existing resources and make strategic investments to improve park operations, safety and security.

Management, Coordination and Planning

- **Create a Parks Department Downtown Division.** Create a new Downtown Parks Division within the Parks Department ("Parks"), similar to the recently designated Enterprise Division, to focus exclusively on the maintenance, operating, security and programming needs of downtown parks.
- **Designate a staff member in the Mayor's Office to coordinate across departments.** A go-to position in the Mayor's Office is needed to troubleshoot and coordinate activities across City departments, including Parks, Neighborhoods, Planning & Development, Police, Transportation (SDOT) and others.
- **Address interdepartmental parks governance issues.** In several parks, management and/or maintenance responsibilities are split among City departments, particularly between Parks and SDOT. All SDOT properties that abut downtown parks should be reviewed, with the assumption that management responsibilities reside with Parks.
- **Integrate publicly and privately owned open spaces with Parks to create a downtown public spaces network.** Non-park open spaces are an important and often overlooked component of the city's network of public spaces. The City should prepare an updated inventory of downtown's publicly and privately owned open spaces, including those owned by public agencies other than the City, and work with property owners to make those spaces accessible and part of a well-publicized system of downtown parks and open spaces.
- **Create a downtown parks and public spaces wayfinding system.** This system should include improved signage at each site, and new brochures and maps that connect and explain how to access the network of downtown public spaces.
- **Develop a long-range downtown parks plan and update the parks component of the City's Comprehensive Plan for Downtown.** This Plan would address park needs and issues, including implementation of park-specific improvement strategies; acquisition of new downtown park properties; and implementation of the new parks and open space impact fee program. This Plan would integrate with the updated parks component of the City's Comprehensive Plan for downtown, which is also needed.



Policy and Legislative Changes

- **Amend Parks policies and procedures to increase park use and enjoyment.** The Parks Superintendent should develop a Parks Code of Conduct, to be posted in each park. Parks should complete the update and streamlining of the Supplemental Park Use Management Guidelines, a process that is already underway.
- **Implement legislative changes to regulations that impede parks revitalization.** The City should take legislative action to: extend the City's panhandling ordinance to parks; revise and simplify the fee structures for events; consider amending the City's noise ordinance, which is overly restrictive compared to other cities'; and authorize the Parks Superintendent to issue five-year agreements for concessions and retail activity in the parks (compared to the one-year agreements currently authorized).

Safety and Security

- **Improve security in the parks.** The City should fund a new Park Ranger security force of uniformed, unarmed Parks staff. The Ranger force would be supplemented by contract security personnel hired by Parks for evening and holiday hours. The Rangers would assume a community policing role, patrolling the parks on foot and bicycle, enforcing park rules and ordinances, and issuing citations for violations, including trespassing and monitoring permits for meal programs operating in the parks. The Rangers would work in close coordination with the Police Department, and would be in radio contact to call for police assistance as needed. The Rangers' presence would be friendly as well as firm, able to provide information about plantings and other park features as well as provide security.
- **Plan and coordinate Police Department operations in the downtown parks.** A coordinated plan and operating procedures for improving security in downtown parks is needed. The plan should encompass coordination with the Park Ranger team; uniform approaches to enforcing City codes and ordinances, including the prohibition against camping; effective communications protocols between Parks and Police; and enforcement of the Code of Conduct to be posted in the parks.
- **Consider installing aesthetically appropriate fencing around the exterior of selected parks.** The City should consider installing decorative fences around a few key parks and opens space. Particularly in small "beauty spots" or parks where late-night illegal behavior is a persistent problem, fences may provide considerable benefits without compromising the downtown parks' aesthetic or civic values.

Maintenance

- **Develop a major maintenance improvement program for downtown parks.** The plan should encompass major maintenance needs for each park and implementation of new practices such as urban wildlife management (rodents, pigeons, geese). It should also address park restroom needs and improvements to their operations and maintenance.
- **Coordinate downtown parks maintenance across agencies.** Some park properties in downtown are maintained by a mix of agencies, including Parks, SDOT, Seattle Public Utilities, the Port of Seattle and the state Department of Transportation (WSDOT). Because some inefficiencies exist in coordinating maintenance by multiple agencies, a coordinated plan for efficient service delivery should be developed, including development of cross-agency service and maintenance standards.

3 Develop a Multi-Year Funding Plan for Investments in Park Improvements and Operations

Parks should develop a long-range plan to fund both enhanced operations and capital improvements/major maintenance in the downtown parks. Operational cost categories include improved park security and assistance through development of a Park Ranger program, and implementation of proactive programming and special events services. Major maintenance needs include repair and upgrading of park infrastructure and public art, landscape and hardscape improvements, and refurbishment of park furniture and amenities. Funding could come from multiple sources, including a new parks levy focused on capital and reinvestment projects, open space impact fees, neighborhood matching funds, Real Estate Excise Taxes (REET), and a public-private partnership focused on revitalizing and upgrading the parks.



Seattle Downtown Parks & Public Spaces Task Force Report



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Downtown Parks and Public Spaces Vision Statement

Seattle's downtown parks and public spaces are a system of vibrant, convivial, people-filled gathering spaces reflecting the city's diversity, history, urban character, and cultural and environmental values. The parks should have individual personalities, yet be connected together into an integrated network of open spaces and recreational places that are well-cared for and well-loved. They should be fun, beautiful, restorative and memorable places to spend time, through all four seasons, day and night

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INTRODUCTION AND TASK FORCE CHARGE

This report presents the findings and recommendations of Mayor Greg Nickels' Downtown Parks and Public Spaces Task Force, charged with making recommendations to the Mayor on strategies to revitalize and activate the City's downtown parks and public open spaces. The Task Force's charge encompassed recommendations in five key areas: parks maintenance; safety and security; programming, events and commercial activities; management; and funding for capital and operating improvements.

The Task Force is part of the Mayor's Downtown Parks Initiative, an effort to make the City's downtown parks the vibrant, attractive and people-friendly public spaces they are meant to be. The group's work is also integral to implementation of the Mayor's City Center strategy, which recognizes that residential growth is occurring downtown at an exponential rate, and is focused on making downtown a livable, energetic place of activity, day and night, seven days a week.

The nine-member Task Force met 15 times over 10 months, toured the parks, and engaged in many hours of thoughtful – and at times spirited – discussion about existing park conditions, operating practices and challenges; the character and opportunities for best use of each park; a vision for a connected system of parks and public spaces in downtown; and adaptable examples of best practices nationally.

Task Force members brought a rich mix of perspectives and experience to the project, including local and national retail and public spaces expertise; on-the-ground familiarity with key parks and their use patterns; knowledge of City policies and practices; and experience creating successful urban public places. Task Force discussions were supported by two staff subcommittees (Park Maintenance, Operations, Safety & Security and Programming & Special Events), which conducted research and analysis; reviewed existing ordinances and guidelines; studied best practices in cities across North America, including Portland, Chicago, New York, St. Louis and Toronto; and presented policy options for Task Force consideration. Task Force members and the subcommittee chairs are listed on the inside cover of this report.

The work of the Task Force built on previous efforts to assess downtown park needs and management options to revitalize the parks, most notably the 2002 *Our Downtown Parks* report sponsored by the Downtown Parks Strategy Committee and the five downtown District Councils, and a year-long staff assessment of downtown parks. The reports and recommendations recently prepared for Occidental Square and Freeway Park by the New York-based Project for Public Spaces were also considered and integrated into the group's work.

Report Organization. The report contains four sections: this first section introduces the Task Force and its charge, Section 2 presents the Task Force's Vision for an interconnected system of downtown parks and public spaces; Section 3 contains key Task Force findings; and Section 4 presents recommendations and the actions required to implement them. Attachment A summarizes the recommended character and niche for each downtown park.

Background and Situation Assessment

The national perspective. Cities are defined in large part by their public assets, and are known and judged by their parks in particular. Public parks speak volumes about a City's livability, safety and character; recognizing this, communities across the country are rethinking and investing in their parks and open spaces as part of urban revitalization strategies. Older and newer cities in

**VISION FOR DOWNTOWN PARKS:
AN INTERCONNECTED SYSTEM OF
UNIQUE PARKS AND PUBLIC SPACES**

the east, west and Midwest areas of the country are all working to make their urban parks safe, attractive, active and interesting places to spend time. Many cities have decided that, if downtown parks are to be successful public places for everyone, revitalization efforts need to involve a community partnership of complementary and supportive resources.

Defining the "downtown" park system. Downtown's park and open space system is shown in the map at right. "Downtown" defined to encompass the area bounded by South Lake Union Park to the north, the International District to the south and Interstate 5 to the east (see map). Two important public spaces in this area, Seattle Center and the coming Olympic Sculpture Park, were not included in from the Task Force's work because they are not managed by the Parks Department ("Parks").

Seattle's downtown parks are great, underused assets. Seattle's downtown parks and public spaces are potentially great assets for the whole city, and will play an especially important role in the City's efforts to enhance downtown's livability and distinctive urban quality of life. Today, however, most parks sit relatively unused. Many people in the city don't know that they exist, much less spend time in them, and there are virtually no organized programs to attract people to them. In the daytime, the downtown community largely passes them by, and in the evenings they more or less become ghost-towns. While some parks are gathering places for transients, predominantly men, others sit vacant on both weekdays and weekends. Some of the furnishings and amenities are old and worn. There is little public art and engaging amenities—such as playgrounds, dog runs and chess tables—are uncommon. Many of the fountains are in disrepair, the landscape could be improved in some parks, and there are limited seasonal plantings. The parks don't feel safe or welcoming and there are few reasons for people to visit them, especially in fall and winter months.

It's time for a renaissance in Seattle's downtown parks. The downtown area offers a potentially remarkable collection of parks—quiet gardens, social commons, waterfront viewpoints and refreshing green spots—that promise to enrich the lives of the downtown community and visitors to the city. But today this promise is not being fully realized. Too many parks are underused and under-valued – not safe, clean or inviting enough, despite the efforts of dedicated City staff who work in the parks. As rising numbers of individuals and families look to downtown as a livable and active residential area, it's time for Seattle to make its downtown parks the beautiful, vibrant and welcoming public spaces they were meant to be. As downtown booms, the parks should bloom.

The Role of Parks and Public Spaces in Creating a Livable City

Great downtown parks are essential to great cities, and parks are a critical element of Seattle's emerging City Center Strategy. To achieve the City's vision and goals for a livable, vital, family-friendly Center City, improvement of downtown parks needs to be a priority. Parks play an essential role in cities as places of respite, recreation and relaxation for people who live, work and visit downtown. They are "third places": not home, not work, but places where people can go to revive, reflect, socialize and, in the case of parks, enjoy the outdoors. They serve as backyards for the downtown community, places for picnics, gathering, communing and entertainment. And livable places need great gathering places and good backyards. As downtown continues to grow and becomes increasingly dense, the complement to urban development—open, safe and people-friendly public spaces—will become increasingly important.

KEY FINDINGS: STRENGTHS, CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Downtown park land is limited and the parks are aging. The relatively limited use of downtown parks is all the more unfortunate because there is relatively little park land in downtown. Although citywide, parks comprise 11% of Seattle's land mass or 6,200 acres (2,700 of which are developed), there are only 32 acres of park property downtown (excluding Seattle Center's approximately 40 acres). These 32 acres are spread across 24 parks, many of which are covered by paved surfaces. Compared to other major cities, Seattle's parks are relatively small, and the newest, Freeway Park, is 30 years old. Other cities have considerable more park acreage downtown, often including large central parks such as San Francisco's Golden Gate Park, Portland's Park Blocks and Vancouver's Stanley Park.

The City's public and private open spaces are key elements of the system, but are not understood or managed systemically. Effective urban parks and open spaces work together and are easily identified and navigated. In addition to parks, downtown is home to publicly- and privately-owned public open spaces. The privately-owned spaces are those which were designated as publicly accessible in exchange for development considerations to allow greater heights and densities. These are often little-known places—located inside and outside downtown office buildings and hotels—that are not generally managed as, or understood to be, public open spaces. They represent opportunities to enhance the city's network of public spaces. City-owned public spaces include sites managed by a mix of City departments. For example, the new public plaza at City Hall is managed by the City's Fleets and Facilities Department. There are also open spaces dispersed throughout downtown that are owned by public agencies other than the City.

Signage and wayfinding can help integrate all of the City's public spaces. Many of Seattle's downtown parks and public spaces now appear to be isolated properties. All the parks could benefit considerably from improved signage, maps and integrated wayfinding.



Work is underway on downtown park planning, design and improvements.

With funding from the 2000 Pro Parks Levy, Parks has undertaken planning, design and implementation projects for many downtown parks. Major capital improvements have been designed for Occidental Square and Freeway Park, and planning is underway for changes to City Hall Park and Piers 62-63. Regrade Park has been improved and activated as an off-leash area for dogs. Myrtle Edwards Park will benefit from the adjacent opening of the Olympic Sculpture Park. “Garden parks,” including Belltown’s P-Patch and Kobe Terrace in the International District, have been informally adopted by their neighborhoods and show the benefits of that presence and care.

Different Roles for Different Parks



Downtown parks fall into three categories. Each of the 24 downtown parks assessed in this report is very different from the others. The “personalities” range from Freeway Park’s multi-level green and planted spaces to the International Children’s Park, a small, tree-shaded square with one of two play structures in the downtown area, to triangular paved pockets that abut busy streets and aren’t recognizable as parks. Recognizing the “apples and oranges” nature of downtown parks, the Task Force developed a three-part framework for categorizing them and assessing their needs and best futures.

- 1. Downtown Destination Parks:** These are signature parks of interest to the broad community. They could become destination places for the whole city as well as gathering spaces for downtown. These spaces are the city’s most underused park assets, and present opportunities for communitywide activities, including partnerships between downtown residents, businesses, arts organizations and the City.
- 2. Downtown Neighborhood Parks:** These are neighborhood-focused parks, where neighborhood involvement in activities and programming—including partnerships between the City and neighborhoods—is most appropriate.
- 3. Small Public Spaces or “Beauty Spots”:** These are attractive respite spaces; small islands within the urban environment that present opportunities to enhance the city’s character and identity, and the public’s enjoyment of downtown, but are not large enough for substantial park facilities. Some lend themselves well to partnerships with neighboring businesses, including the adopt-a-park program.

Parks have personalities. Each park has a character or “personality” based on its location, features and functions. Strong personalities can help define neighborhoods, focus park improvements and programming, build a sense of ownership among nearby workers and residents, and make the city are more varied and interesting place. The downtown parks’ personalities are assets, that can be nurtured and built upon as Seattle develops a great urban park system. Many parks also have location-specific needs and opportunities. The Task Force’s recommendations regarding the character, needs and best opportunities for each of the parks are shown in Attachment A.

Park Operations and Maintenance

Maintenance of the downtown parks is a challenge, given park use patterns, the age and condition of the facilities, funding constraints, and accumulated deferred maintenance. Although Seattle's downtown parks are relatively small, they pose large-scale operational challenges for the City. Workers provide maintenance to downtown parks at 2.5 times the level provided elsewhere in the city. Enhanced maintenance crews funded by the Pro Parks Levy are assigned to routes on which they clean a park and then often return less than two hours later to clean it again. Under current maintenance levels, Parks is unable to meet community expectations for cleanliness and aesthetics on a consistent basis; frequency of cleaning (litter pickup, trash removal and pressure washing) is less than needed in some parks; and repairs are not always completed as promptly as community members desire. An underlying problem is that infrastructure conditions have deteriorated at the sites to the point where even the best routine maintenance practices will not result in park conditions that meet community expectations.

Multiple departments and jurisdictions are responsible for the parks, creating opportunities for efficiencies through coordination of maintenance practices and schedules. Currently, portions of several parks are managed and maintained by multiple City departments, and in some cases, multiple jurisdictions. For example:

- **Occidental Square:** Parks maintains the park, but both Parks and the Seattle Department of Transportation (SDOT) have jurisdiction. Parks has jurisdiction over the cobblestone area; SDOT has jurisdiction over the brick area, which is the unopened portion of Occidental Mall.
- **Westlake Park:** Parks has jurisdiction over the fountain area, other portions belong to SDOT. Parks maintains the whole park.
- **Freeway Park:** Portions of the park are maintained by a mix of public and private entities: the Washington State Convention & Trade Center, WSDOT, Park Place and Horizon House.
- **Kobe Terrace:** Multiple agencies manage property (Parks, Department of Planning and Development, SDOT, Washington State Department of Transportation, Inter*Im Community Development Association, Metropolitan Apartments).
- **Tilikum Place:** Parks owns the fountain, the surrounding area belongs to SDOT, and Parks maintains.
- **Union Station Square:** This park is under Parks jurisdiction, but SDOT maintains it.
- **McGraw Square:** This park was previously part of the adopt-a-park program and is now maintained by Parks.
- **Westlake Square:** This park was previously part of the adopt-a-park program and is now maintained by Parks.
- **Washington Street Boat Landing:** This area is City right-of-way (a street end), owned and maintained by SDOT. The Port of Seattle owns the fenced area. Parks property was a pier that has been removed, therefore Parks has no jurisdiction over the property.



Park Safety, Security and Civil Behavior

Civility, safety and security in the downtown parks need significant improvement.

Seattle's parks should be places of civil behavior where people treat each other and the parks with respect. The City has put one tool in place, the Parks Exclusion Ordinance, which authorizes police and some Parks staff to expel from a park, or series of parks, people who repeatedly violate the Park Code. This Ordinance has been useful, but much more needs to be done to make the parks feel safe and secure. Research on comparative municipal practices shows that cities with successful downtown park systems—where the parks are widely used and enjoyed by the community—spend more money on park safety than on maintenance. This is a real differentiator among the cities studied. The City of Chicago, for example, has 60 police officers designated for its parks. Other cities also have police dedicated to patrolling the parks, and/or have implemented Park Ranger security programs. An increased visual presence of police is needed in many downtown parks.

Expectations of civil behavior in downtown parks are not explicit. Other public places, such as Safeco Field, Qwest Field and Metro buses have codes of conduct that outline which behaviors are acceptable and which are not, and these codes are regularly enforced. The newly renovated Cal Anderson Park on Capitol Hill has successfully used signs to establish the expectation of civil behavior. Downtown parks is another place where civil behavior is required for the enjoyment of all users, but currently there is no parks code of conduct that can be read by users and pointed to by Parks staff and police.

The City's panhandling ordinance does not apply in parks. Aggressive panhandling is a problem at some parks, particularly Waterfront, Steinbrueck and Westlake. Seattle's panhandling ordinance applies only to sidewalks and public rights-of way.

Uniform enforcement of City codes and ordinances is needed. Currently, there is no uniform interpretation of the City's Municipal Code provisions for conduct in the parks, and it is not clear what behavior is allowed and not allowed in parks. For example, the Park Code (Sec. 18.12.27) prohibits camping, but does not define what constitutes camping. Thus, this Code provision is differentially enforced in different sections of the city; in some parks sleeping in the park is overlooked, in others it is not.



Park Rangers are an effective means to improve park safety and security. Nearly every U.S. city faces challenges in managing public open spaces in dense, urban environments. In response to this challenge, a number of cities have implemented the Park Ranger concept. Park Rangers originated in President Theodore Roosevelt's administration, as a means to provide an improved visitor experience in the national parks. The Rangers had hybrid roles, serving as part naturalists, historians, conservationists and law enforcement support staff.

Park Rangers are in use in Portland, Los Angeles, Boston and several smaller cities including Nashville and Mesa, Arizona. Rangers are typically uniformed, unarmed park security forces, working for the city parks department. They play a community policing role in urban parks, serving to answer questions, give directions and generally ensure that park visitors have a safe experience in those places. They undergo customer service training and use it to enforce the city's park rules and regulations. Duties including patrolling (on foot and bicycle), enforcement of park ordinances, providing assistance to the public, and help with emergency service needs and issuance of citations for violations, including trespassing and permit violations. They work in close coordination with the city police department and are in direct radio contact.

There are proven security (and other) benefits to perimeter fencing. Major cities throughout North America and Europe use exterior fencing, typically made of wrought iron, to enclose selected parks. Fencing allows a park to be physically closed during the late night and early morning hours, deterring illicit uses and reducing security and maintenance costs. Park fences can be attractive in themselves, and can be aesthetically beneficial—to smaller open spaces in particular—by providing definition and protecting seasonal plantings.

The Police Department plays a critical role in improving park safety and security. The Seattle Police Department (SPD) will be an integral part of any successful effort to make the parks active and successful public spaces.

Park Programming, Special Events and Commercial Activity

Programming, public art and perimeter activities are missing pieces of the parks puzzle. Parks does not have the staff to design major programs and activities for the downtown parks. Consequently there is little active programming occurring. Activating the spaces through thoughtful, carefully tailored programs in the destination parks is one of the fastest and most effective means to improve park use and enjoyment, and will have ripple-through effects on community perceptions about the safety and desirability of visiting the parks. Programs could be designed for various seasons and to appeal to people of all ages and interests, including children, teens, seniors and downtown workers and families. Programs should change frequently to encourage repeat visits; the return on investment in programming activities will be high. The design and implementation of an exciting, well-managed and well publicized set of activities could bring several of the parks a surge of new energy and improved reputation, sparking a virtuous upward spiral of increased park usage, improved safety and enhanced visitor experience.

Other sources of interest and activity are also largely untapped. Public art, which can draw visitors as well as add beauty, is absent from most downtown parks. Some parks also have the potential for greater activity along their edges; a park can become more interesting and active if, for example, seating for a neighboring café is allowed to spill out into it.

A paradigm shift is needed in the City's approach to events in the parks. Special events are now handled by Parks on an as-requested basis – the City responds to event ideas and, until 2005, how not initiated them. Moreover, both Parks and the Downtown Seattle Association receive requests for events in parks, but neither organization has staff resources to manage or respond to such requests. Requested events can be anything from a wedding or family reunion in a park, to a company picnic, to a sponsored music performance or festival. In contrast to Seattle, other cities are able to facilitate and manage events in the parks; in Portland, for example, there are reportedly 250 events a year in the parks.

Obtaining an events permit is by all reports complex and difficult, with an application process that is cumbersome to navigate. Restrictive park use guidelines adopted in 1982, an overly complex fee structure, very stringent public health requirements that make it difficult to sell food in parks, and similarly stringent noise limits and requirements all combine to make Seattle a relatively inhospitable place to hold an event. In contrast, some cities have developed customer-friendly processes, including “one-stop shopping” for permit applications and fees that are bundled together in simplified form.

Appropriate types of retail activity can help activate the parks. There are opportunities at selected destination parks downtown to offer food and goods for sale, particularly through portable kiosks. Retail activity can create interest and bring activity to the parks, which will, in turn, improve park safety and perceptions about the parks as attractive, welcoming destinations. Concession operators, along with volunteers and programming staff, can serve as “natural monitors” to discourage and report uncivil or illegal behavior. Retail can also enhance City revenues. The City will need to approach this topic carefully, working in collaboration with neighboring businesses to ensure that the kiosks selected are commercially viable, yet are not in direct competition with those businesses.

Community Outreach, Involvement and Partnerships

Outreach and community involvement are key elements of success. There are many people and organizations who care greatly about the success of Seattle's parks. This interest presents an opportunity that should be nurtured through outreach, engagement and active community organizing. New partnerships are possible with existing organizations that adjoin the parks, including the Seattle Aquarium Society for Waterfront Park planning and programming, and the Pike Place Market PDA for Steinbrueck Park improvements. Parks should also build on

existing partnerships with the Freeway Park Neighborhood Association for Freeway Park, and the Pioneer Square Community Association for Occidental Square programming. Beyond these existing organizations, there are opportunities to work with many others in the downtown community on programming activities and park improvements. Businesses could participate in programming including a revitalized adopt-a-park program, and people living or working near parks could be organized and engaged to support their local parks.

Park Management and Funding

Downtown parks are different, requiring special efforts to manage and operate effectively. Downtown parks present operating challenges and needs that differ from those of less urban parks. Because they serve more visitors per square foot and receive more wear and tear than other parks, they require a higher standard of care. Their usage translates into requirements for higher levels of maintenance, higher levels of attention and security, and more frequent replacement and upgrades. As a tradeoff, downtown parks also present greater opportunities to serve the public through effective programming of public activities and events, as well as opportunities for public-private partnerships to support and improve them.

The City should invest in improving and maintaining its downtown parks. The downtown parks need refurbishment, reinvestment and a higher level of attention and care day-to-day. Amenities that make parks enjoyable and special are largely lacking – including flowers, art, movable tables and chairs to accommodate groups of varying sizes, and other playful and welcoming touches. On the capital side, nearly half the sites need major maintenance, as many have not received serious attention or upgrades in more than 20 or 30 years. A fundamental challenge is that the level of capital investment in parks and public spaces has not kept pace with the rate of population growth and private investment in downtown.

Seattle's downtown parks need a new approach to management and funding. The importance of parks to downtown's future as a livable, successful urban place, combined with the magnitude of park needs, calls for new thinking and new approaches to achieve success. Formation of a City-community partnership is a concept that has been implemented successfully in many cities, with variants to the model crafted to respond to local priorities and politics; examples include the Central Park Conservancy in New York City, Friends of Post Office Square in Boston and Portland's Pioneer Courthouse Square, Inc. These approaches bring the City's resources together with community resources and capacity to create energy, funding and successful programs that would not be otherwise possible.





Foster a Downtown Parks Renaissance Through a New Partnership Between the City and the Downtown Community

Seattle's downtown parks are underused assets that can help transform the city center into a vibrant urban place of day and night live-work-play activity. Cities across the country with successful downtown park systems have recognized the catalytic role of parks in creating people-friendly, livable downtowns, and are investing significant maintenance, capital, security and programming resources in those spaces. Recognizing the complexity, special operating needs and funding requirements for a vital, active downtown park system, many cities have designed new management systems and structures to effectively meet those needs. In particular, activating the parks through lively events and programs, and creating an energetic parks advocacy and support network within the downtown community are two needs that are best met through a new management approach. Specific activities included in this approach would be:

RECOMMENDATIONS AND IMPLEMENTATION REQUIREMENTS

Programming and Events

- Creating exciting activities in the parks, and publicizing and marketing them
- Managing special events, including the design and management of new events
- Promoting small-scale activity, such as entertainers and craft carts that rove from park to park
- Providing help to organizations and individuals with the events permitting process, including coordination with the permitting agencies
- Working with City staff to reinvent the existing Special Events Handbook as an attractive, user-friendly resource

Community Organizing and Capacity-building

- Enhancing relationships with existing park-specific advocacy groups and building relationships with new ones
- Organizing and building community support for neighborhood-focused parks
- Engaging with the surrounding downtown community, including organizing volunteers
- Developing new partnerships, relationships, and sponsorships

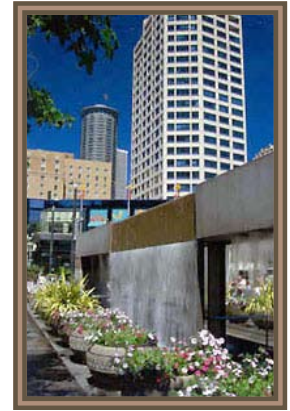
Fundraising and Advocacy

- Fundraising to support capital improvements and identified maintenance needs
- Advocating for downtown parks, including potential new parks

Liaison with Businesses

- Rejuvenating the adopt-a-park program and coordinating with adjacent businesses
- Working with building owners and managers to improve and publicize the city's privately owned but open-to-the-public spaces
- Participating in the development of park concession concepts and the selection of retail sellers, in coordination with neighborhood groups

Implementing a new management approach could be accomplished by starting a new organization, partnering with an existing organization(s), or a combination of the two approaches. The Downtown Seattle Association (DSA) has been active on the Task Force, and sees downtown parks as an important element of a livable downtown. The DSA is interested in discussing this opportunity further and in potentially taking on a role in the implementation of these recommendations.



2 Implement a Coordinated, Citywide Action Plan to Improve Downtown Parks

The City should realign and focus existing resources and make strategic investments to improve park operations, safety and security.

Management, Coordination and Planning

- **Create a Parks Department Downtown Division.** Create a new Downtown Parks Division within the Parks Department ("Parks"), similar to the recently designated Enterprise Division, to focus exclusively on the maintenance, operating, security and programming needs of downtown parks.
- **Designate a staff member in the Mayor's Office to coordinate across departments.** A go-to position in the Mayor's Office is needed to troubleshoot and coordinate activities across City departments, including Parks, Neighborhoods, Planning & Development, Police, Transportation (SDOT) and others.
- **Address interdepartmental parks governance issues.** In several parks, management and/or maintenance responsibilities are split among City departments, particularly between Parks and SDOT. All SDOT properties that abut downtown parks should be reviewed, with the assumption that management responsibilities reside with Parks.
- **Integrate publicly and privately owned open spaces with Parks to create a downtown public spaces network.** Non-park open spaces are an important and often overlooked component of the city's network of public spaces. The City should prepare an updated inventory of downtown's publicly and privately owned open spaces, including those owned by public agencies other than the City, and work with property owners to make those spaces accessible and part of a well-publicized system of downtown parks and open spaces.

- **Create a downtown parks and public spaces wayfinding system.** This system should include improved signage at each site, and new brochures and maps that connect and explain how to access the network of downtown public spaces.
- **Develop a long-range downtown parks plan and update the parks component of the City's Comprehensive Plan for Downtown.** This Plan would address park needs and issues, including implementation of park-specific improvement strategies; acquisition of new downtown park properties; and implementation of the new parks and open space impact fee program. This Plan would integrate with the updated parks component of the City's Comprehensive Plan for downtown, which is also needed.

Policy and Legislative Changes

- **Amend Parks policies and procedures to increase park use and enjoyment.** The Parks Superintendent should develop a Parks Code of Conduct, to be posted in each park. Parks should complete the update and streamlining of the Supplemental Park Use Management Guidelines, a process that is already underway.
- **Implement legislative changes to regulations that impede parks revitalization.** The City should take legislative action to: extend the City's panhandling ordinance to parks; revise and simplify the fee structures for events; consider amending the City's noise ordinance, which is overly restrictive compared to other cities'; and authorize the Parks Superintendent to issue five-year agreements for concessions and retail activity in the parks (compared to the one-year agreements currently authorized).

Safety and Security

- **Improve security in the parks.** The City should fund a new Park Ranger security force of uniformed, unarmed Parks staff. The Ranger force would be supplemented by contract security personnel hired by Parks for evening and holiday hours. The Rangers would assume a community policing role, patrolling the parks on foot and bicycle, enforcing park rules and ordinances, and issuing citations for violations, including trespassing and monitoring permits for meal programs operating in the parks. The Rangers would work in close coordination with the Police Department, and would be in radio contact to call for police assistance as needed. The Rangers' presence would be friendly as well as firm, able to provide information about plantings and other park features as well as provide security.
- **Plan and coordinate Police Department operations in the downtown parks.** A coordinated plan and operating procedures for improving security in downtown parks is needed. The plan should encompass coordination with the Park Ranger team; uniform approaches to enforcing City codes and ordinances, including the prohibition against camping; effective communications protocols between Parks and Police; and enforcement of the Code of Conduct to be posted in the parks.

- **Consider installing aesthetically appropriate fencing around the exterior of selected parks.** The City should consider installing decorative fences around a few key parks and opens space. Particularly in small “beauty spots” or parks where late-night illegal behavior is a persistent problem, fences may provide considerable benefits without compromising the downtown parks’ aesthetic or civic values.

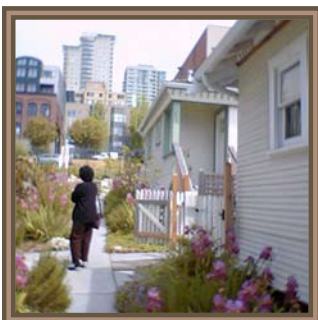
Maintenance

- **Develop a major maintenance improvement program for downtown parks.** The plan should encompass major maintenance needs for each park and implementation of new practices such as urban wildlife management (rodents, pigeons, geese). It should also address park restroom needs and improvements to their operations and maintenance.
- **Coordinate downtown parks maintenance across agencies.** Some park properties in downtown are maintained by a mix of agencies, including Parks, SDOT, Seattle Public Utilities, the Port of Seattle and the state Department of Transportation (WSDOT). Because some inefficiencies exist in coordinating maintenance by multiple agencies, a coordinated plan for efficient service delivery should be developed, including development of cross-agency service and maintenance standards.



Develop a Multi-Year Funding Plan for Investments in Park Improvements and Operations

Parks should develop a long-range plan to fund both enhanced operations and capital improvements/major maintenance in the downtown parks. Operational cost categories include improved park security and assistance through development of a Park Ranger program, and implementation of proactive programming and special events services. Major maintenance needs include repair and upgrading of park infrastructure and public art, landscape and hardscape improvements, and refurbishment of park furniture and amenities. Funding could come from multiple sources, including a new parks levy focused on capital and reinvestment projects, open space impact fees, neighborhood matching funds, Real Estate Excise Taxes (REET), and a public-private partnership focused on revitalizing and upgrading the parks.



DOWNTOWN DESTINATION PARKS

The Task Force identified 10 parks as destination parks. The character or “personality” of each and the improvements each needs to fully realize its character are summarized below.

ATTACHMENT A

RECOMMENDED CHARACTER & NICHE FOR SEATTLE’S DOWNTOWN PARKS

Westlake Park (Fourth Avenue and Pine Street)

Character: A central gathering space in the heart of the retail core, a “piazza for all ages” and Seattle’s Town Square. A safe, kid-friendly, comfortable place for large-scale events and programs. A place with tables, chairs, and benches that encourages resting, reading and people-watching. A place to park bicycles and safely leave packages. A vibrant, active place with interesting things to read or activities to participate in – the carousel in winter, water features, music and street performers, retailers selling street art.



Improvement Needs and Opportunities: Upgraded electricity and power to support events; tables and chairs; a place to load and unload trucks; and potentially a park concierge to provide directions, answer questions and set out chairs and tables, would enhance the park.

Freeway Park (Seventh Avenue and Seneca Street)

Character: Seattle’s Public Garden, where people go for beauty, quiet, contemplation and enjoyment of nature. A little Seattle Center, ringed by arts groups, easy for tourists to visit, entered from many directions. Also a bridge between residential First Hill and the jobs and attractions downtown. A large, beautiful landscaped site that could connect the city’s office core and surrounding residential areas. With 5.5 acres, there is room for lots of things in this park: walking; “Summer in the Park” programs and activities – trike races, used book sales, others; and music performances, including smooth jazz and others.

Improvement Needs and Opportunities: A more defined landscaping plan is needed for both safety reasons and to refresh the plantings. Strong signage is needed to lead people to the park, which is hard to see from many streets. Dramatic lighting would improve safety and encourage twilight users, as well as glowing upward to the office towers. A monitored restroom is needed to replace the closed, unsafe one. Extending the fingers of green toward larger populations, particularly in the Union and University corridors, is essential. There are also opportunities for enhanced support and engagement from surrounding businesses and organizations that benefit from its amenities. The jurisdictional conflict between the East and West police precincts, which have hindered police response and activity in Freeway Park, needs to be resolved.



Occidental Square (Occidental Avenue S and S Main Street)

Character: Seattle's Left Bank, a place for discussing art, books and culture. A funky, grassroots place for gathering, relaxing and enjoying urban amenities and programs. A place to eat lunch and enjoy a cup of coffee. Opportunities for arts (including performance art and spoken word), crafts, music, literature, and history-related programs.

Improvement Needs and Opportunities: Planned improvements to the park's hardscape and landscape will make a difference. One or more retail kiosks should be considered to generate pedestrian activity and interest in the park. The trolley barn's new nearby location could be integrated into the park's character and amenities.



Victor Steinbrueck Park (Western Avenue and Virginia Street)

Character: This great urban space is adjacent to the Pike Place Market and serves as an open space for Market workers and visitors. It is also the only open space in the Market area where one can sit and enjoy the water view. It should be a beautiful and tranquil place, to complement the Market's energy and activity. It should serve as an amenity for both residents of both the market and Belltown.



Improvement Needs and Opportunities: The park needs to be better integrated into the Pike Place Market, to serve as a complement to the bustling Market experience. The park would benefit from the formation of a partnership between the City and the Pike Place Market Preservation and Development Authority to address park management and operational issues. Other solutions to the park's current challenges could include increasing the number of "eyes on the park" through increased programming and activities, and an increased security presence. Additional sidewalk seating would help, as would removal of current impediments to outdoor Cutters Restaurant seating. The public toilet located on the sidewalk adjacent to the park does not work and should be replaced with better-situated and more functional restrooms.

City Hall Park (Third Avenue and Yesler Way)



Character: The best use of this space is as an activity park for the neighborhood. To realize this objective, the park needs to become a site that is safe and comfortable for everyone.

Improvement Needs and Opportunities: There need to be comfortable places to sit and activities to engage in and actively watch. This will require changes in the hardscape, programming and police practices. It may be helpful to put a wrought iron fence around it the site and close the fence at night. This could help with the park's significant safety and security problems.

Myrtle Edwards Park (3130 Alaskan Way W)

Character: An exercise and special events park that's open 24 hours a day – “the Green Lake Park for downtown” and Seattle's Beachfront. A safe place to walk, jog, bicycle and more. Potential activities: a parcourse (cardio/stretching stations) arranged around the park; volleyball nets; and more family-friendly amenities, including places for picnicking and barbecuing.

Improvement Needs and Opportunities: Myrtle Edwards benefits from the new Amgen pedestrian bridge connection across the railroad tracks, and will benefit from the opening of the Olympic Sculpture Park. The new bridge greatly increases accessibility to the park by connecting Elliott Avenue W to the waterfront, and the City should work with Amgen to communicate and celebrate this new connection. Likewise, the opening of the Olympic Sculpture Park will bring more park visitors and foot traffic through Myrtle Edwards, presenting an opportunity to integrate with and complement the Olympic Sculpture Park. There will also be improved shoreline access, all of which represents an opportunity for increased use of the park. Improved wayfinding is needed now, and will be needed even more as the new developments near completion. Wayfinding is needed both internally within the park and to connect it to downtown.



Pier 62-63 and Waterfront Park (1951 Alaskan Way and 1301 Alaskan Way)

Background: The Task Force considered Pier 62-63 and Waterfront Park together, as downtown's waterfront park property. Pier 62-63 is currently unusable and closed to the public; the piers are structurally unsound and need to be torn down. Waterfront Park is a large open, underused space with great potential for activities and as a gathering space. Improvements and planning for the waterfront are under way in the context of the Central Waterfront Master Planning process. As those projects unfold and are completed, the waterfront is likely to become a regional and even statewide destination.

Character: The Waterfront Park site offers a park with access to the water and connectivity to the city. One opportunity it presents is for family recreation: it is the best park in downtown for kids and family-friendly activities. Another opportunity is as a relatively large-scale gathering place. The city needs a big site on the waterfront for festivals – such events are economic drivers for downtown and the Belltown area – and with the closure of Piers 62-63, the city currently lacks such a place. Waterfront Park should be designed and programmed as a place for both family fun and special events, including weddings and private parties.



Improvement Needs and Opportunities: There is an opportunity for a partnership between the City and the Aquarium regarding planning and programming for this public space.

Hing Hay Park (Maynard Avenue S and South Jackson Street)

Character: A community and cultural gathering place for the International District/Chinatown and the city's Asian community. A place to express and experience Asian culture. A quiet place for children, adults and seniors to commune.

Improvement Needs and Opportunities: The park has some programmed activities now, and could benefit from additional activities. Key partners in this effort are the Community Action Partnership, the Seattle Chinatown/International District PDA, and the International District Community Center Advisory Council. The planned redevelopment of the Bush Hotel will also help improve this park's activity and vitality.



South Lake Union Park (Terry Avenue N and Valley Street)

Character: A 12-acre park-in-progress, highlighting Seattle's historic maritime traditions, that will play a more prominent and versatile role in the city over time. Plans call for the completed park to incorporate space for large outdoor public gatherings, the Naval Reserve Building (which can host large gatherings indoors and/or can be used as a maritime venue), public access to Lake Union, restored natural habitat, a bridge and a waterfront boardwalk. The nonprofit Center for Wooden Boats, a model boat pond, public art and other features will highlight the city's maritime heritage.

Improvement Needs and Opportunities: The Seattle Parks Foundation has worked with Parks to develop a long-range park plan, and is in the process of a major fundraising effort to implement this multi-faceted plan.



DOWNTOWN NEIGHBORHOOD PARKS

The Task Force categorized seven parks as downtown neighborhood parks. These are beloved neighborhood amenities, serving neighbors that feel a strong sense of ownership in them, and their continued improvement will be an important complement to downtown's residential growth.

All of these parks have some natural programming occurring, by virtue of their character and amenities. Most, but not all of them also have some neighborhood interest and level of involvement in their operations. This involvement could be increased with a targeted neighborhood outreach and engagement effort that invites participation in park activities. There are also opportunities for new and strengthened partnerships between neighborhood groups and Parks, including collaboration in the creation of park-specific programs. Brief park descriptions follow:

- **Kobe Terrace (Maynard Ave. S and S Main St.):** a sloped, tiered farmers' garden supported by neighboring residents. Some problems with park camping and illegal behavior.
- **International Children's Park (Seventh Ave. S and S Lane St.):** a well-maintained and attractive corner park, with benches and climbing structures for children. Could be better publicized and used.
- **Regrade Park (Third Ave. and Blanchard St.):** recently converted to use as a dog off-leash area. A social gathering place for dog owners; now considered to a successful park.
- **Belltown P-Patch and Cottages (Elliott Ave. and Wall St.):** a beautiful and well-cared for garden. Some problems with park camping and remaining detritus that interfere with perceptions of park safety and enjoyment.
- **Denny Park and Playground (Dexter Ave. and Denny Way):** with increasing residential development in the surrounding area, this park is likely to take on new importance and a new role as a central neighborhood park. There is funding in the budget to begin development of a children's play area in the park. One management challenge is that the Parks' administrative offices are located on the site, taking up a quarter to a half of the park property. These offices may need to be relocated in the future, to make room for the site to fully function as a park.
- **Plymouth Pillars Park (Boren Ave. and Pike St.):** (formerly Pike/Pine/Boren Park) is being developed as a dog off-leash area; its character will largely be defined by that use.
- **Cascade Playground (Thomas St. and Pontius Ave. N):** a newly renovated, great neighborhood and family-friendly park, that will grow in use as development continues in the Cascade and South Lake Union neighborhoods.



SMALL PUBLIC SPACES – BEAUTY SPOTS

The Task Force identified seven park “beauty spot” opportunities. These sites are now relatively overlooked, even ignored, public spaces. With some care and attention—particularly seasonal plantings—they can be transformed into attractive focal points in the urban landscape, small oases that add texture, interest, color and variety to downtown streets. The City of Chicago serves as an exemplar, with many vividly planted beauty spots interspersed throughout downtown. The use of ornamental fencing around planted areas is also worth considering; most major cities use this technique to define certain park spaces and make them easier to maintain.

This summer, Parks followed suit and planted McGraw Square with seasonal flowers, with transformative results. The downtown beauty spot spaces are:

- **Pioneer Square Park**
- **Prefontaine Place**
- **Tilikum Place**
- **Union Station Square**
- **McGraw Square**
- **Westlake Square**
- **Washington Street Boat Landing**

Fortson Square was initially included in this list, however because it is part of the street right-of-way, and is owned and maintained by SDOT, the Task Force determined it to be outside the scope of this report.



